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Review of Key Stage 2 Strategies and Outcomes

**Report for Slough Borough Council
Education and Children's Services Directorate**

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Project Code SBO

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background and Aims

In November 2008 Slough Borough Council's Education and Children's Services Directorate commissioned the National Foundation for Educational Research (NFER) to evaluate and review the area of key stage 2 performance in the borough's schools. This focus for the review was chosen because, to some extent, key stage 2 outcomes appeared to have reached a 'plateau' over the previous four to five years, whereas performance in key stages 3 and 4 had clearly improved. This had occurred despite a number of interventions and support strategies being implemented in Slough's primary schools.

The formal aim of the project, therefore, was to carry out an independent overview of key stage 2 provision and outcomes in Slough, in order to make an assessment of any factors that might be inhibiting progress in this area, and to suggest any new or additional strategies that might enable improvements to be made.

1.2 Methodology

Information was collected using three main methods:

- a small-scale review of relevant national evaluations and guidance materials
- an analysis, by NFER's statistical group, of Slough's school performance data
- interviews with six primary headteachers, one deputy headteacher and two LA officers.

Further details of each of these research methods are provided in the following paragraphs.

Review of national evaluations

The first stage in the review was to make use of recent or current NFER studies that would help to set the national context for policies and strategies for raising achievement in key stage 2. It was agreed that the key studies to be reviewed would include the following:

- **Local authorities and school improvement: the use of statutory powers.** This project, funded by the Local Government Association (LGA), has examined how twelve case-study LAs monitor their schools and implement strategies for raising standards, including the use (or non-use) of statutory powers such as issuing warning notices or requiring schools to work with other educational partners.
- **National Strategies evaluations.** The NFER is currently in the process of carrying out, and has already completed, several evaluations on behalf of National Strategies. These include several that relate to interventions for raising achievement in both primary and secondary schools.
- **Study of the impacts of migration on children's services and schools.** This is a recently-completed project for the LGA. It examined the views of those working in children's services and schools, in order to gain their perceptions of current pressures, challenges, benefits and good practice in relation to dealing with migration.

In addition, the research team examined national guidance materials relating to pupil mobility and effective guidance for primary schools. The aim of conducting these reviews was to help set the national context for strategies for raising achievement at key stage 2. What has been the effect of contextual factors, such as migration and pupil mobility in other areas, and how have these impacts been addressed? And what kinds of strategies and interventions have been used to raise attainment at key stage 2 in other LAs? The reviews are summarised in Section 1.3 below.

Data analysis

At an early stage in the evaluation the NFER's project leader and Head of Statistics met with personnel from Slough Borough Council's performance data team. This enabled the researchers to draw upon the expertise and experience of Slough colleagues and to find out more about the key stage 2 data analyses conducted to date. NFER statisticians, in turn, were able to make use of their experience of analysing school performance data across LAs and, if appropriate, to consider making recommendations about any further data analyses that might be useful.

NFER also ran a number of statistical models with key stage 2 indicators as the model outcomes. This enabled the provision of an analysis of national data that compared all pupils and all schools nationally to ascertain whether Slough pupils' performance was above or below pupils with similar demographic backgrounds. The findings from the data analysis are presented in Section 2.4 below.

Interviews with key personnel

In order to obtain up to date views of practitioners' on key stage 2 strategies and outcomes, interviews were carried out with six headteachers (and one deputy headteacher) from six primary schools across Slough during November and early December 2008. An interview was also conducted with two key LA officers in December.

The purpose of the headteacher interviews was to obtain current views from school-based practitioners on strategies and outcomes in key stage 2. Specifically the interviews focused on the:

- context of the schools and its impact on teaching and learning
- progress schools had made in relation to key stage 2 outcomes in recent years
- strategies that have worked, or could work, to help raise attainment
- perceived barriers to improvements in outcomes
- relationship between the Every Child Matters agenda and raising attainment.

The Raising Achievement Service identified six primary schools and provided NFER with the contact details for the headteachers to be interviewed. Headteachers were informed about the research project following a headteachers' meeting with Slough Borough Council's Assistant Director, Raising Achievement.

The six schools were geographically spread across the borough. The headteachers involved in the study also represented a range of school types across Slough, including faith schools, junior and primary schools. The headteacher interviewees had been in post for a number of years, ranging from two to twenty years, and were from both genders.

An interview was also carried out with the Assistant Director, Raising Achievement and a senior colleague. This interview provided an overview of the LA context and the school improvement strategies used.

The interviews, for both headteachers and LA staff, were semi-structured and included coverage of the following questions:

- What is the context in which the school/local authority operates? How does this impact upon teaching and learning?

- What progress has been made in schools with respect to key stage 2 outcomes in recent years?
- What are perceived to be the main barriers to bringing about improvement in key stage 2 outcomes?
- What strategies have worked (or could work) in terms of raising attainment at key stage 2?
- What have been the relationships between the Every Child Matters agenda and raising achievement?

1.3 Review of Relevant National Evaluations and Literature

The first stage of the research was to review recent or current evaluations to provide the national context for policies and strategies to improve achievement in key stage 2. Reviews of three relevant evaluations were carried out (and others are identified at appropriate points in this report):

- local authorities and school improvement: the use of statutory powers
- National Strategies evaluations
- study of the impacts of migration on children's services and schools

In addition to evaluations, national guidance documents were also reviewed. These included:

- Effective pre-school and primary education 3-11 project (EPPE 3-11)
- DfES Managing Pupil Mobility Guidance.
- Pupil Mobility in Schools

Local authorities and school improvement: the use of statutory powers

For this 2008-9 study, on behalf of the Local Government Association, the NFER conducted 12 qualitative case studies and interviewed LA officials, School Improvement Partners (SIPs) and headteachers within each local authority. Based on these interviews (Keating *et al.*, 2009) it was found that statutory powers, such as warning notices and 'required' institutional partnerships had not been regularly used in the case-study LAs, and that they were predominantly used as a last resort. NFER found that all stakeholders preferred the collaborative 'partnership' approach to school improvement, which they felt was working well and, in the vast majority of cases, achieving the improvements that were desired.

Careful examination of the approaches used by LAs to support school improvement suggested that, while individual details in these processes may vary, there was what might be described as a ‘standard’ collaborative model of school improvement, based on the use of non-statutory strategies. Typically, these included:

- production of policy statements on school improvement and schools causing concern
- regular monitoring and reviewing of the performance of their schools
- use of multiple data sources to monitor school performance and progress
- categorisation of schools in terms of performance and need
- provision of differentiated levels of support
- use of an integrated, cross-sectoral policy approach
- use of School Improvement Partners (SIPs) to provide challenge to schools and feedback to LAs
- peer support networks for schools
- a collaborative approach to school improvement.

Evidence presented in the following chapters indicates that many of these strategies are used by Slough, and that in these respects Slough resembles many LAs across the country. Regular monitoring and review, the use of SIPs and collaboration are particularly evident, although it might be argued that, with reference to collaboration that there has perhaps been more emphasis to date on authority-school collaboration than on school-to-school collaboration.

National Strategies evaluations

Since 2006 the NFER has been carrying out numerous evaluations on behalf of National Strategies. These include several that relate to interventions for raising achievement in both primary and secondary schools. The most relevant of these was an evaluation, completed in 2007, of the contribution of National Strategies to the SITU-funded project to improve primary school performance in targeted schools in three cities (Smith *et al.*, 2007). The three cities selected for the project - Bristol, Stoke and Leicester – were all areas with high proportions of schools below the key stage 2 floor targets in mathematics and English.

There was a relatively high degree of satisfaction, on the part of both schools and local authorities, with the SITU-funded projects. School staff were, on the whole, satisfied with the targeted support being provided by their local authority, and LA staff were appreciative of support from National Strategies. However, two important qualifiers needed to be added to this positive view. Firstly, it was rapidly established that schools had a central need for a package that could be customised to their needs (and provision for this was implemented as the package was introduced); and secondly, it was found that, despite the overall success of the initiative, there were still some schools that were experiencing ‘hard-to-shift’ levels of underperformance. These two findings resonate with some of the comments made by Slough respondents in subsequent chapters of this report.

Study of the impacts of migration on children’s services and schools

This is an ongoing project for the LGA. It is a review of the existing literature and research on the impact of migration to explore the issues and challenges faced by local authorities and schools and effective ways of overcoming them. The researchers involved in this project have noted that studies exploring the impacts of migration have found that the lack of migration data and information presents significant challenges for those planning and delivering services. An example of this is in the planning of school places and provision, which can become particularly difficult as unexpected arrivals put pressure on admissions (mid-term), requiring consistent support and forward planning.

Other difficulties may relate to schools having little information available about pupils’ backgrounds (educational and otherwise), thus making assessment and support arrangements particularly difficult. Despite such challenges, there are policies and initiatives to support schools in managing the inclusion of immigrants, and the study will attempt to identify and summarise these (Martin, 2008).

Effective pre-school and primary education 3-11 project (EPPE 3-11)

The findings from this longitudinal study are of relevance to Slough Borough Council and its primary schools, particularly those from the projects on: (1) the pre-school, school and family influences on children’s development during key stage 2 (2008); (2) the influences on children’s attainment and progress in key stage 2: and (3) cognitive outcomes in year 5 (2007). EPPE findings of specific relevance to this study include:

- Pupils who had three or more siblings had lower attainment in reading compared to other pupils. This may, in part, help explain low attainment for pupils who live in multi-occupancy housing.
- Pupils who required English as an Additional Language (EAL) support showed lower average attainment levels in reading and mathematics.
- Although the sample of minority ethnic groups in the EPPE project was small, and therefore the findings should be treated with caution, the project found that Bangladeshi and white European pupils had lower attainment in reading than other pupils. Given the recent new intake of Eastern European communities to Slough this may account, in part, for attainment levels across the borough.
- Pupils from families with low income, measured by free school meal (FSM) entitlement, and those from low socio-economic groups had a negative relationship with achievement. However, high quality pre-schooling appeared to have a long term impact on all children, particularly those from the most disadvantaged circumstances (see Section 5, Issues for Consideration).
- Mother's highest qualification and pupils' experience of quality early years home learning environment (HLE) were found to be the most important factors for positive academic and social-behavioural outcomes in key stage 2 (when controlling for all other background factors). High quality early years HLE was also most beneficial to boys, those with special educational needs (SEN) and pupils in disadvantaged circumstances in relation to social and behavioural outcomes.
- Pupil receipt of no or poor quality pre-schooling, combined with attendance at a less academically effective primary school, were found to have a negative impact on the pupil's prospects of good educational outcomes.
- Pupils with better self image and who were from families which were disadvantaged, but valued education as a way of improving life, were found to have better educational outcomes.
- Parental support for learning and communication between school and parents was perceived by teachers involved in the research to improve educational performance.
- After controlling for other background factors, mobility during key stage 2 predicted lower levels of mathematics achievement.

The EPPE project provides some interesting contextual information for Slough schools regarding key stage 2 performance.

Managing Pupil Mobility Guidance

The Department for Education and Skills (DfES) guidance on Managing Pupil Mobility is of relevance to this study due to the high proportion of new admissions (pupils who join school mid-term) within and across Slough schools. The DfES guidance defines four categories of mobility (international migration, internal migration, institutional movement and individual movement), each of which is present

in Slough schools. The guidance also defines types of mobile groups, factors that contribute to mobility and it offers examples of good practice. International migration, which is reported to have the greatest complexity of issues for pupils, families and schools, is particularly prevalent in Slough.

The guidance, however, states that mobility should not be used as an ‘excuse’ for low performance even though high levels of pupil mobility can create significant challenges for schools. Challenges cited were resources, staffing and impacts on the stable pupil community. The impact of the mobile population is not perceived to be wholly negative as the presence of pupils from different cultures and countries creates a richness and diversity to the community, improves commitment to learning and in some cases raises attainment.

Issues discussed in the guidance that are pertinent to Slough and its pupils relate to:

- The potential negative impact of moving to a new school on attainment for pupils who have to deal with: integrating into a new physical and educational environment which may be alien to them; dealing with language issues; having the confidence to make friends with peers, and adapting to new routines. A change in school is often associated with other significant life changes (for example, family breakdown, new home/country), therefore pupils often have additional emotional issues to tackle. Given that information to schools on new intakes is often patchy, if existent, schools not only have to assess the intellectual capabilities of new pupils, but also their emotional well-being and language comprehension.
- Schools usually have one dominant mobile group within the community, but others can exist. Although schools in Slough tend to have one dominant mobile group, several mobile communities have arrived in the area in recent years, including families from Eastern Europe, Africa and Asia.
- The guidance states that, depending on the needs of the predominating group, schools must prioritise provision, for example access to EAL or basic skills for the socio-economically disadvantaged. Schools in Slough deal with multiple needs of different mobile and stable communities, so prioritisations of this type will clearly be important.
- In 2002, Ofsted reported a negative relationship between low performing schools and mobility levels of greater than 15 per cent; however there was a word of caution, as it is difficult to isolate the impact of mobility from other factors such as SEN, EAL and deprivation (all of which are prevalent in Slough schools).
- The DfES guidance suggested that one measurement of mobility (of eight possible choices) should be used by LAs and schools to enable comparability between schools and LAs (as developed by Dobson in 1999):

$$\text{Mobility} = \frac{\text{Pupil joining schools} + \text{pupils leaving school} + 100}{\text{Total on school roll}}$$

Using this formula, high mobility is measured as ≥ 20 percent, and very high mobility is ≥ 35 per cent.

Pupil Mobility in Schools

Dobson *et al* (2000) explored the nature and causes of pupil mobility and the implications of high mobility on raising standards in schools. The research focused on the primary phase of education. Key findings relevant to this study include:

- Schools with high mobility (not those with armed forces pupils) also have many vulnerable children as part of the mobile and stable community, including those with low income, SEN and/or children with EAL. Gypsy, Roma and Traveller children are also often a feature of these schools. Many schools in Slough experience some or all of these issues.
- High mobility can have a negative effect on schools, including using up additional staff time and/or resources, unsettling the stable community, and requiring the need to reorganise classes. These can affect pupil learning. The research also found that aggregate school performance data can be affected where there is a loss of high achieving pupils and where low achieving pupils have not attended school for sufficient time to have achieved the desired levels of achievement - an issue that appears to affect Slough schools.
- Not only does pupil mobility impact on individuals, classes and schools, but also on LAs. Dobson *et al* found that the work of admissions, education welfare, SEN, language support and traveller teams were impacted by pupil mobility. In addition, other LA departments were affected, including housing, social services and finance.
- Dobson *et al* suggested that LAs try to find ways of reducing the levels of mobility in schools with higher mobility issues and where there are large groups of disadvantaged pupils, by working closely, for example, with housing departments and other housing providers to locate families to different areas.
- It was recommended that schools with highly mobile populations should establish induction procedures and assess pupils at entrance and exit points, as well as the means to continuously measure pupil performance. These practices appear to be well established within Slough primary schools.
- Dobson *et al*'s research supports Slough headteachers' views that setting targets two years in advance is to some extent meaningless in schools with highly mobile populations. In addition, performance tables do not reflect the progress made within schools and this can demoralise teaching and support staff who are already under extreme pressure to raise attainment.

Dobson *et al's* research complements the findings of this study and supports the arguments put forward by headteachers and LA officers, specifically those related to target setting, the complexity of mobility, emotional/behavioural needs and socio-economic circumstance, and the impact of these on attainment.

2. Context

2.1 Local Authority Context

Slough Borough Council serves what can, in many respects, be described as a ‘mixed’ community and it is not possible to provide a simple, single description of this community. The context for the borough’s schools was described by LA officers as ‘extremely complex’.

The school population has very mixed ethnic characteristics. Some 52 per cent of the school population has English as an Additional Language (EAL). In some schools the EAL proportion is as high as 95 per cent. There are also very high levels of mobility, including migrants from India, Pakistan, Eastern Europe and other overseas communities. An important role of the Borough Council and for the Education and Children’s Services Directorate is to provide support and advice on integration. This is partly achieved, in schools, by means of a carefully-planned induction process and the provision of learning clubs for EAL children.

The proportion of pupils eligible for Free School Meals (FSM) varies, but some schools are in the highest ten per cent of schools nationally. There are very differing levels of educational aspiration across families, neighbourhoods and communities. The family unit itself can take different formats, including carer-based families, large extended families and families in multiple-occupancy dwellings. It is sometimes difficult to obtain parental engagement, but, as one LA officer stressed: *‘Our schools actually work really hard on this’*.

Despite these levels of variation and diversity, community cohesion in the borough was described by the LA officers as *‘fairly good’* and in general there are *‘excellent’* relations between schools and the LA. The LA has a *‘small, but strong, team’* for addressing school improvement. Working relationships between schools and between schools and the LA were reported to be *‘very effective’* and Ofsted recognised the strengths of the school improvement service. Ofsted also noted that there were good procedures for intervention in schools, where these were required. Ofsted reported that Slough Borough Council’s educational provision was *‘good with outstanding features’*.

2.2 School Contexts

To provide a context within which Slough schools operated, headteachers were asked to describe their pupil intake and local community. Headteachers from each of the schools mentioned pupil mobility, children with SEN, those entitled to FSM, children with EAL, and the ethnicity of pupils when they described their school context.

Pupil mobility was an important everyday issue for most of the schools involved in this study, with headteachers reporting having between 60 and 165 pupils moving in or out of the school in the previous year. Further complicating the situation, many new admissions arrived at the school with very limited, if any, ability to speak English. Headteachers reported a minimum of 12 and a maximum of 36 languages spoken within their schools, with most schools having at least 30 languages spoken. Ethnic diversity within the schools was high, with only one school reporting mainly white English pupils on roll. As the ethnic makeup of Slough has altered over recent years with increased numbers of people of Black Somalian origin and Eastern European origin (in particular Polish) moving to the area, this has clearly had an impact on the pupil intake and school resources.

In addition to many ‘new to England’ pupils on roll, headteachers described their local communities as socio-economically disadvantaged, with many families living in vulnerable situations (including, for example, having low educational achievement and aspirations, dealing with emotional issues such as domestic violence) and/or living in multi-occupancy housing. Living in an overcrowded environment had implications on the effectiveness of the learning that took place within the home environment, where pupils often had inadequate space to do homework and store books, or lacked a quiet place to concentrate.

Even though data is collected on the proportion of pupils entitled to FSM, headteachers often viewed this data as meaningless due to the fact that many families did not claim their entitlement; or were not eligible to apply due to their ‘new to England’ status or because the process for applying for FSM was too complicated. One headteacher noted that the index of multiple deprivation (IMD) on their pupils does not tell the whole picture on the socio-economic status of families because, for example, the postal code of the family home is favourable (for example SL3), but this does not account for the multi-occupancy status of the home.

When asked about the proportion of pupils with SEN, headteachers noted differing proportions for their schools, ranging from around 20 to 40 per cent. A small number of headteachers explained that some of their pupils had complex special needs, and other schools had pupils with speech and language difficulties. Speech and language difficulties were exacerbated for some children with EAL which further inhibited their progress at key stage 2.

Impact of school context on teaching and learning

The LA officers indicated that the complexity and diversity of the borough's school population meant that, with particular reference to key stage 2 outcomes, the Raising Achievement service had *'to do a huge amount of work just to stand still'*. The effects of EAL, pupil mobility, family contexts, FSM and social deprivation *'all together'*, presented a considerable challenge for school improvement and raising attainment strategies and programmes.

Headteachers also reported that mobility, family circumstance and 'new to England' pupils/pupils with EAL were having a significant impact on the effectiveness of teaching and learning. Specifically, headteachers referred to:

- **Pupil mobility** as causing difficulties with target setting and pupil assessment in relation to the SATs. Headteachers explained that pupils who had targets set were often unlikely to be the pupils who were actually assessed because they had moved away from the school by then. Pupil mobility also impacted on teaching and learning in the sense that complex support structures were required in schools to meet the needs of their pupils (see Section 3.2 for further details).
- **Family circumstance**, including socio-economic disadvantage, was also impacting on teaching and learning. For example, schools could not assume prior learning to children starting school in key stage 1. The educational attainment and aspirations of some parents was also low therefore, in some cases, they were unable to support their child's learning. For other families, their command of the English language was limited both verbally and in writing, and this inhibited their child's ability to become fluent in English. Some families also chose to take extended leave to visit relatives abroad during crucial periods of schooling, which resulted in pupils having significant gaps in their learning.
- **'New to England' pupils and high EAL levels** had resource implications for many schools. One headteacher explained that due to the frequency and large numbers of new intakes, all teaching staff had to be trained to the equivalent of an EAL-specialist teacher to effectively support and assess pupils. Other schools employed bi-lingual teaching and support staff to support pupils to ensure that they were able to access the curriculum. Most headteachers described their class structures as complex, but also necessary to ensure that all pupils received appropriate support to engage with the curriculum and learn basic skills.

2.3 Progress at key stage 2

Headteachers and LA officers were asked about the progress made, if any, at key stage 2 over recent years. The general context was that, while there had been consistent improvements in outcomes at the other three key stages, outcomes at key stage 2 appear to have reached a 'plateau'. The LA interviewees noted that, based on raw test scores, the borough had always been below the national average at key stage 2, and sometimes in the bottom quartile: *'We seem to make progress in one area but decline in another. A focus on numeracy, for example, could impact [negatively] on something else'*.

It was clear that all headteachers were extremely committed to improving outcomes for their children, as was demonstrated by their commitment to try out new strategies (see Sections 3.2 and 3.8 for details of strategies implemented in schools). All headteachers expressed how remarkably proud they were of their pupils to be achieving the level of attainment they reached, given the challenging context within which they learned. As one headteacher put it:

We see our children making such progress, we are so proud of the development that they make with us... the progress our children make is immense. We see that every day.

Another said:

What these EAL children achieve is incredible. I couldn't imagine being in years 4, 5, 6 and having to do it all in an alien language where the alphabet might look the same but it doesn't sound the same but these children do very well, surprisingly well.

Most headteachers reported a general upward trend in SATs results over recent years and they hoped that attainment would continue to improve in the future. One headteacher noted that the school had tried many strategies, all of which staff perceived to be making a difference, but no improvement in SATs has been recorded. This resulted, to some extent, in a demoralised workforce.

Other reasons for lack of progress over recent years included changes to the school's organisation, changes in test papers (see Section 4.2) and performance thresholds continuously changing. Another headteacher felt that the large proportion of SEN

pupils in his/her school had a large impact on progress due to the complexity of their needs.

All headteachers interviewed were appreciative of the support of the LA and were hopeful that improvements in attainment would be realised in the future as a result of the strategies that they had introduced. They also noted that there were some barriers to improvement in outcomes over which they had no control, such as the format of tests and the use of threshold grading systems.

2.4 Statistical data

The NFER's Statistics Research and Analysis Group (SRAG) were asked to assess the work undertaken by Slough LA in attempting to understand and explain why there has been an apparent stagnation of results at key stage 2. Over the last few years the percentage of pupils attaining level 4 and above at key stage 2 had not risen in line with improvements in GCSE results and perceived improvements achieved in other similar authorities, most notably Luton.

A meeting took place between NFER statisticians and data analysts from Slough LA. It was very clear that the level of local analysis carried out by this group was thoughtful and attempted to address possible issues that could explain the LA's performance at key stage 2. In this respect the NFER would concur with the LA officer comment that: *'We have really good data. If it moves we can measure it!'* The authority has data, for example, on ethnicity, SEN, FSM eligibility, religion and looked after children.

One area that had not been covered, however, was the possible impact of grammar school entry tests and the level of motivation that remains for high stake tests once results and ultimate destinations are known. The LA officers were clearly aware of these possible impacts and they mentioned the effects of the 11+, the possible effect of this on motivation for SATs tests, coaching and grammar school entry. However, further analysis could be carried out to determine whether there is a relationship between entry test results and performance at key stage 2. Qualitative research would also be needed to determine the possible effects of selection tests on pupil motivation.

The team at Slough LA make use of the Contextual Value Added (CVA) residuals that are produced in national datasets but a re-analysis of the 2007 key stage 2 results

was carried out to see whether the average progress made by pupils in Slough schools was significantly different from similar pupils in other local authorities. The overall level of achievement, i.e. the percentage of pupils at level 4, may in some respects be disappointing, but progress is in line with other similar pupils in similar schools. Pupil level multi level models were created as this modelling technique takes account of the hierarchical nature of the data: pupils, in schools, in a local authority. Three outcome measures were included: one continuous measure, average key stage 2 points score, and two threshold measures indicating whether a pupil had achieved level 4 or above in English and mathematics.

Models were run looking at the performance of pupils and the average progress made between key stage 1 and key stage 2. The models were created to understand variation in outcome while controlling for a variety of school and pupil level characteristics. These characteristics included, gender, ethnicity, free school meal eligibility, special educational needs, free school meal eligibility at school level, the performance of the school in the 2006 key stage 2 tests, region and IDACI (Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index).

Indicators were also created to identify pupils in Slough schools and this variable was entered into the model to see if there was any significant difference in the average progress made by these pupils and pupils in other LAs. In discussion with the Slough team a flag was also created to identify pupils in Luton LA schools, as this authority, in the past, had been used as a comparison LA. A number of interactions were created to see if the relationship between deprivation and outcome was any different for pupils in Slough LA schools. Interactions were also created for prior attainment at key stage 1 and school performance in 2006. These interactions allowed the analysis to identify:

- whether high or low ability pupils in Slough schools performed differently to other similar pupils
- whether Slough pupils from low or high areas of deprivation performed differently to other similar pupils
- whether Slough pupils in high-performing schools performed differently to those in high-performing schools in other LAs

These interactions were also created for pupils in Luton schools. On average, and for similar pupils in similar schools, the progress of Slough pupils was *as expected*. There was also no significant difference for pupils in Luton LA schools. None of the interactions showed any significant difference and all findings applied across all three outcome measures. When looking at the average progress of pupils and their

performance at key stage 2, whether looking at average points score or whether they achieved level 4, the interpretation is consistent that the progress of pupils in Slough schools was in line with progress nationally.

3. What the schools do well

Headteachers were asked about strategies that they had implemented within school, either national or local, to help improve key stage 2 outcomes; for their views on these strategies, and for details of other initiatives that they believed would add value to performance. Approaches that were viewed positively by headteachers included:

- setting targets and tracking pupil progress
- supporting ‘new to England’ pupils and those with EAL
- enhancing children’s ability to engage with the curriculum and personalised learning
- improving the quality of teaching and staff retention
- improving parental/community involvement
- reorganising class structures
- enhancing the emotional well-being of children and staff
- targeted support programmes.

3.1 Target setting and tracking pupil progress

The LA has a partnership contract with each school and each school has a SIP (School Improvement Partner). SIPs assist the school with target setting and tracking pupil progress. The LA officers explained that SIPs were managed within Raising Achievement teams and they were well respected. Ofsted had commented on the very effective use of SIPs. This was one of the outstanding features of the borough’s educational service. SIPs look at pupil progress term by term. They assist the schools with performance planning and can flag up individual children who may need attention or support. Performance meetings are held with individual teachers.

An additional service provided by the LA Raising Achievement unit is the detailed analysis of key stage 2 test scripts. Responses to each question in the tests are analysed carefully and there is a quick turn-around for this analysis, so that the primary schools receive them by the end of the summer term and they are also passed on to the relevant secondary schools. These analyses are used by SIPs, by heads of department and as a basis for planning and providing professional development.

Over half of the headteachers interviewed mentioned a relatively recent (within the past five years) change in the way pupils were tracked and targets set. They explained that teachers set targets for individual children, as opposed to class level target setting, in order to monitor, assess and evaluate progress. One headteacher described this process as *'relentless'* to ensure that no child fell behind but also as crucial in improving attainment through personalised learning. In addition, all schools were following the advice given in the Pupil Mobility Guidance, that they should establish formal procedures for monitoring progress of new intakes as soon as possible.

3.2 Supporting new to England pupils

Half of the headteachers interviewed described specific interventions that they targeted at 'new to England' pupils, including employing teaching and support staff who were bilingual, taking pupils out of class for specific intensive work for a short period of time, translating tests into mother tongue for pupils who required support, trying to introduce 'new to England' children to the school as a block rather than ad hoc and induction programmes.

In a small number of schools, pupils were supported in class by bilingual staff. Pupils who joined schools with no or very little command of the English language were, in some schools, fully integrated in the class with support from teaching and support staff. In other schools, pupils were taken out of class and given targeted support. Another school tried to introduce 'new to England' pupils together as a block (where possible), as opposed to ad hoc admissions. The reason for this approach was to ensure that pupils received an intensive support and induction programme so they had the ability to cope with the classroom environment.

One headteacher explained that interventions specifically targeted at the mobile communities also helped the stable community because of the emphasis on learning basic literacy and numeracy skills. The length of time pupils were supported out of class in intensive support programmes ranged from two weeks to one and half terms, depending on the school, or longer if required.

Regardless of the structures in place to support 'new to England' pupils, schools promoted a smooth and effective integration into the school, including induction processes, either formal or informal. This enabled teaching and support staff to assess pupils' language and academic ability. All headteachers felt that all pupils progressed

from their entry point, although in many instances this was not to the required national minimum level.

The LA officers also stressed how hard schools had been working to address the cultural, language and other issues that ‘new to England’ pupils might be experiencing. There was funding for supporting new arrivals and the authority carried out assessment of new arrivals on behalf of the schools. Much work was being carried out on language development and comprehension skills. It was reported that there was much good practice in the borough. Some schools could be regarded as ‘centres of excellence’ in this respect. There was also a well-regarded induction programme, leading teachers working with schools, and attempts were made to engage pupils in their first language, as well as in English. Community assistants assisted with these processes.

3.3 Curriculum engagement

It was clear that all headteachers were enormously committed to improving outcomes for *all* their pupils, as was demonstrated by one headteacher’s comments:

The bottom group... might be able to manage the basic skills to get them (a score)... they may only get a good level three and understand what they’re doing then we feel we’ve done that as a stepping stone even though it doesn’t credit our results.

Specific strategies, linked to target setting and individual pupil tracking, that headteachers employed to improve pupil engagement in the curriculum included: personalised learning; the purchase of new IT equipment; implementing Creative Partnerships/learning, and providing a diverse curriculum to ensure pupils remained ‘turned on’ by school.

IT and/or creative learning were used to promote engagement, particularly for boys in one school. The benefits of these interventions, headteachers hoped, would be demonstrated through an improvement in results in the near future. Anecdotally, interviewees felt that these strategies to diversify the curriculum were already having a positive impact on teaching and learning.

3.4 Improving the quality of teaching and staff retention

In most of the schools, headteachers felt that the quality of teaching and learning had improved in recent years. Mostly this was attributed to improved recruitment and retention, collegiality, CPD and continuity of teaching staff for pupils. The approaches schools adopted to improve retention of staff varied. One school, for example, had a system of ‘grow your own teacher’ whereby support staff were trained to become teachers. Another school adopted a fragmentation of management structures. The cyclical process of recruiting newly qualified teachers at the same time meant that they reached middle management at a similar time, and therefore left the school seeking promotion. This problem had been addressed in part by a change in school management structure. This was a more costly approach for the school, but the headteacher felt it was worth the expense due to improved attainment.

All headteachers felt that the consistency of the quality of teaching had improved in recent years. Previously they had noted that some teachers delivered high quality learning continuously, whereas for others it was less consistent. Through CPD activity (specifically pupil tracking and formative assessment) and the recruitment of new staff, headteachers felt that the quality of teaching across the school was either good or excellent, and would, therefore, hopefully improve outcomes for pupils.

3.5 Reorganising class structures

All headteachers described how they had re-structured their classes to meet the needs of their pupils, often describing their set up as ‘*complex*’. One school, for example, had split its two classes into three teaching groups to ensure that new intakes (specifically those who were ‘new to England’) caused minimum disruption to the class dynamics. New intakes were introduced to one smaller teaching group so the child could be integrated and assessed by the teaching and support staff before being moved into the appropriate teaching group. In other schools, pupils were supported through smaller group work for some subjects (literacy and numeracy), but in science, for example, were taught in whole classes, with level 3 pupils paired with level 5 pupils. It was felt that this improved the understanding of all pupils through dialogue and team work.

3.6 Emotional well-being of pupils and staff

Headteachers were specifically asked about the extent to which the introduction of the Every Child Matters (ECM) agenda had impacted on attainment. All interviewees explained that their school had always been '*very ECM*' promoting the emotional well-being of the pupils and staff, but they did feel that ECM had 'formalised' their holistic philosophy. For some schools, headteachers explained that ECM had helped to improve the emotional literacy of the pupils and staff, even enhancing retention of teachers, and that the improved behaviour of pupils had contributed to improved teaching and learning. The development of '*pupil voice*' and a restructuring of the staff in one school were also partly attributed to the ECM agenda.

A small number of headteachers felt that there was conflict between the ECM agenda and Ofsted inspection framework. They explained that, regardless of how good the school was at meeting the five ECM outcomes, schools were only ever really assessed on attainment outcomes. As a result, for example, the quality of the teaching could only be scored as 'satisfactory' even if it was 'excellent' because the test results did not reflect the true progress made. Teachers, they felt, were being assessed on only one aspect of their job.

Despite the introduction of ECM not being directly attributed to improved outcomes in all schools, all headteachers felt that a targeted improvement in the emotional well-being of pupils had been a contributory factor in improving outcomes. Every school targeted the emotional well-being of pupils and some schools actively promoted strategies to support the emotional well-being of staff as well. Approaches to support the emotional well-being of pupils included 'Antidote' (an emotional literacy programme of support), one-to-one support for pupils, dedicated inclusion and/or behaviour teams and positive rewards systems. Relationships between teaching staff and pupils in one school were reported to have improved dramatically since the introduction of targeted well-being programmes.

Headteachers felt that these interventions had improved emotional literacy and cases of extreme behaviour (which was now non-existent) and therefore created a better environment for learning. In addition to improving outcomes for pupils, these interventions also improved the retention of teaching staff.

The LA officers supported most the points made by the headteachers. They also suggested that there had been benefits from making alignments between the different directorates and units within the authority. ECM meant that there was now much more

joined up work, for example across issues of admissions, attendance, inclusion, educational psychology and special educational needs. School improvement professionals have been able to involve colleagues from a children's services background. There has been much integrated work, for example, on improving behaviour and this has had an impact on achievement and attainment.

3.7 Enhancing parental and community engagement

All headteachers reported a good relationship with parents and wider community yet it was also an area that schools would continue to prioritise for development in order to improve parental support and engagement in their child's learning. About half of the schools specifically mentioned a marked improvement in parental engagement within the past few years. The reason for this was due to improved flexibility on the school's part to welcome parents and the community into the school. Headteachers mentioned that having a parents evening, for example, is not always suitable for some parents, many of who might be attending their own learning settings to improve their own language ability.

An example of an approach being trialled in one school was *'Parent Champions'*. A group of about 20 parents would meet with the headteacher on a monthly basis. The purpose of these meetings was to help open the school up to the community in order to further promote learning experiences to pupils and the families. This also enabled the school to learn from their communities experience and incorporate these into teaching. Other parents/carers were able to see that *'Parent Champions'* were actively engaged in the life of the school, and were more willing to accept a welcoming hand from a fellow parent than a teacher, from whom parents sometimes feel isolated.

Other schools offered extended classes for parents and the community as a way of getting parents into the physical buildings and thereby making the school more accessible. Headteachers felt that there was more to be done to enhance parental and community involvement in school life, but they had high hopes for the impact that this would have on attainment in the future.

There was also evidence of some sharing of good practice between schools, but there may well be scope to develop this sharing further.

3.8 Targeted support programmes

Owing to low socio-economic status and pupils with varying degrees of EAL, schools were targeting pupils with support intervention programmes. These included national programmes such as the Improving Schools Programme (ISP), the National Strategies EAL programme and Investors in People, all of which headteachers commented had helped contribute to improved performance.

The LA officers mentioned a number of further initiatives. These included the 'Moving Image Project' (involving the use of moving images to inspire writing), Every Child a Writer, Every Child a Talker (in the early years), and the social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) programme. They stressed that being a small LA meant that the authority had to think very carefully about which national initiatives should be taken up. There can be much material to digest and it is easy for LA officers to feel 'overloaded'. The various initiatives could be 'disparate', so it was always important to stress the purpose of the initiative, to emphasise how it enhanced teaching and learning and how it related to the school development plan. SIPs played an important role in this process.

Other NFER research projects on school improvement suggest that the pragmatic, 'pick and mix' approach to national initiatives taken by Slough is common to many LAs across the country. These initiatives and programmes have to be adapted and customised to the needs and circumstances of the schools involved. Without the support of the school staff, particularly the headteacher, such programmes are unlikely to succeed, and this LA, like many others, is rightly judicious and selective in the adoption of national initiatives. This approach was summarised in a comment about the National Strategies programmes:

We choose what we believe will make an impact. What's thrown at us is not always suitable. We take a pick and mix approach.

Evidence collected from the NFER's evaluations of various National Strategies programmes (see Section 1.3) indicates that this approach is not uncommon across England.

In addition to national initiatives, schools focused on developing the basic skills of all/most pupils through literacy and numeracy interventions. For example, one school was developing reading within school time as pupils lacked support in the home environment. Another school was running a rolling programme targeted at specific

pupils to develop their English and science ability. Another school ensured every pupil, including those in need in year 6, received 12 minutes of phonics three times daily in order to improve their literacy skills. The Ros Wilson approach to writing was adopted by one school as the senior managers felt that was a suitable approach for use with the community, based on their specific needs. Schools also offered before and after school clubs and lunchtime clubs to further support pupils. These gave them, for example, the time and space they lacked in the home environment to do homework.

Despite the plateau in results over recent years, all headteachers interviewed were committed and enthusiastic about implementing strategies that they felt would help improve outcomes for all their pupils. That said, there were several barriers to improved outcomes, some of which headteachers felt that they could address, others that they could not. These are discussed below in Section 3.3.

4. Barriers to improving outcomes

Interviewees were asked about barriers that inhibited progress in key stage 2 attainment. These included:

- tests and inspection grades
- cultural barriers
- recruitment and retention of staff
- curriculum
- behaviour
- mobility.

4.1 Tests and inspection grades

All interviewees identified tests, particularly in terms of their design and content, as constituting one of the main barriers to attainment at key stage 2. This is summed up in the following quotation:

There is a responsibility from the test designers to really analyse whether the test questions themselves are barriers for some children, and equally accessible for all. The language involved in science and maths gets more and more demanding every year.

Headteachers felt that pupils needed a certain level of English comprehension to understand and answer the tests, but this was something many of their pupils did not possess. Some schools tried to support their pupils by translating, specifically the science tests, to enable them to answer the questions. One headteacher mentioned that this is particularly an issue for Polish children as science terminology does not exist in their home language. One headteacher specifically commented that the examination process should not be about time, but ability. He explained that the fact that a child can answer the mental mathematics question correctly should be more important than the speed at which they can answer it.

Another issue that headteachers had with the examination system was that many of the pupils who sat the tests were not those who were measured for predicted score or key stage 1 results because of inward and outward mobility. It was also often the case that the most able pupils would be mobile out of Slough: in one school this was as

much as 40 per cent of their pupils. In addition, the tests measured pupils at one brief moment in time, and with the complex and multifaceted issues facing many of Slough's children, this is an unfair measure. Headteachers could not even assume that pupils would attend school on the day of examinations, despite interventions put in place to ensure that children arrived early, were fed, settled in and parents made aware of the importance of the SATS. In one school, two able pupils did not attend school due to family circumstance, which then resulted in a four per cent drop in scores before the exam had started.

The LA officers noted that inspection reports and gradings often showed just how well Slough schools were doing. These provided evidence, for example, that there was a high percentage of good school leadership in the borough. However, they also felt that the inspection grading system could sometimes work against Slough schools. This was largely because of a feeling that the attainment grade in the inspection report tended to predominate against all other grades. In other words, even if a school was making very good progress in terms of, for example, 'personal development and well being' and 'care, guidance and support' (both arguably very important in a mixed community with high rates of pupil mobility, such as Slough), this would probably not be reflected in the school's grade for overall effectiveness.

There was also concern about the ability of some inspectors to analyse complex data, and about the possible effects of an overall 'satisfactory' grade for schools. The satisfactory grade is grade 3 out of 4, and can affect the morale of school staff, and yet it can also indicate that a school is achieving 'as would be expected' given the characteristics of the pupil intake.

It is worth noting that findings from national evaluations of school and LA perspectives on Section 5 inspections indicate that Slough is not alone in raising these concerns about the effects of inspection grades. A team at the NFER has been evaluating Section 5 inspections since 2006 and concerns about the use of data for inspections and the impact of the 'satisfactory' grade have been raised by a substantial proportion of schools (McCrone et al., 2007). It should also be noted, however, that the majority of schools also expressed overall support for the 'new' inspection system, with shorter visits and shorter reports.

In order to help address these issues in Slough, all Raising Achievement officers and can assist schools with preparing for inspection by carrying out briefings and reviews with school staff. This is part of the usual review/school improvement and planning

cycle. In addition, SIPs help schools with the Self Evaluation Form (SEF), and there are plans for all advisers to be Ofsted trained.

4.2 Cultural barriers

Headteachers explained that many of their pupils are disadvantaged by cultural barriers, including lacking certain experiences of English culture; low socio-economic status and low aspirations for the future; a lack of learning taking place before age five and outside of the school environment, and commitments outside of core hour schooling, including extra parental leave and religious holidays.

Headteachers explained that, owing to the circumstances in which many of their pupils lived, they could not assume learning prior to joining school, and they could not assume also that learning took place within the home environment. An example which all headteachers felt disadvantaged their pupils was an examination question about a fairground in Victorian England. As some of the schools did not study Victorian England, the children were not aware of what life was like then. In addition, they did not possess the language ability (due to EAL) or the imagination to embellish. It was felt that this was a cultural and social issue – the content of the question simply was not appropriate for some children.

Some pupils were not aware of what a radio broadcast sounded like as they do not have a radio in the home. Headteachers felt that the same question could have been asked about a sports personality or contemporary figure that the pupils could engage with to give them a fair chance.

In addition to cultural barriers resulting in pupils' inability to engage with some test questions, cultural barriers also result in very long days for some pupils who have extra-curricular and/or religious activities to attend. For some children, late night television also impacted on levels of concentration during the school day.

Some parents were reported not to place the SATS tests as highly relevant particularly after their child had taken the 11+ examinations for secondary school. In addition, many parents in low socio-economic circumstances were poorly educated and lacked aspirations. This was sometimes transferred to pupils and also meant that pupils did not receive the necessary support within the home environment.

4.3 Recruitment and retention of staff

As noted above, improving the recruitment and retention of teaching staff was perceived by headteachers as a successful measure that had helped to improve educational outcomes for pupils. However, for many years within Slough, recruitment and retention of staff was a real issue that headteachers felt considerably impacted on pupil outcomes.

School has to work hard on recruitment and retention. It is a challenging school, it is hard work every day. Teachers have to be very responsive to change, always have spare books and have to personalise the learning...every class has a range of ability, the range is complex... which is very demanding for teachers.

Other headteachers felt that the location of Slough, being so close to London (where teachers would be paid an additional £5,000 for the London-weighting) and Windsor/Maidenhead (more affluent areas with fewer social mobility and emotional well-being issues) did not encourage teachers to remain in Slough schools with challenging pupils living in disadvantaged circumstances. Headteachers also felt that Ofsted inspections demotivated teachers who worked hard and managed to improve performance: retention of teaching staff was made difficult for some schools when they were rated only as 'satisfactory'. One headteacher explained:

(Ofsted) impacts on motivation of teachers and luckily after the inspection this time no teachers were lost due to the strong community atmosphere but this has been an issue in the past.

The LA officers agreed that there had been 'some recruitment issues' in the past, but emphasised that these 'have improved'. They also confirmed that, in many respects, Slough was 'like a London borough', but without the London weighting allowance.

4.4 Curriculum

A small number of headteachers described the curriculum as too prescriptive and, as a result, not the most effective way of supporting learning. For example, one headteacher felt that basic literacy and numeracy skills should be taught through a diverse curriculum as opposed to dedicated subject specific time. Another felt that Assessing Pupil Progress would make the situation worse within some schools as it encourages teachers to 'teach to the test'.

4.5 Emotional well-being

As mentioned above, many pupils in Slough have complex emotional needs, and although headteachers felt that they were addressing and improving pupils' behaviour and emotional well-being, it was still reported to be a major factor that had prevented improved attainment outcomes in key stage 2 over recent years.

In addition, about half of headteachers noted that many families had poor aspirations for themselves and their children which resulted in low self esteem. In some instances, this was further exacerbated when some parents put pressure on their child to take the 11+ exams (sometimes against school advice), which further impacted on low self-esteem. This also resulted in some pupils' experience of an examination prior to the key stage 2 SATS as negative which could possibly further inhibit progress. One headteacher explained:

Some children take the 11+ when we believe that is not the best thing for them ... and they 'fail' or however that is conveyed to them. That impacts on self-esteem and motivation ...the SATs do not receive the same [parental] attention. The 11+ system adds complexity for us in Slough. The test can be an unpleasant experience therefore when it comes to the SATS the last test experience they have to refer to was negative.

4.6 Mobility

The mobility issue has recurred throughout this report and is clearly viewed as a barrier to progress at key stage 2 by all headteachers. Headteachers quoted research that found it took up to seven years for children to learn English. This, taken with the headteachers' concerns about the tests, further disadvantaged their pupils' ability to achieve and exceed national average scores, particularly when in some school almost half of pupils do not experience the English language outside of school. One headteacher said:

I have read research that says it takes about seven years for EAL children to reach the fluency level of native speakers. Any assessment short of that span of time can catch them out on nuances of the language because they are working at too literal a level.

In addition, schools could not ensure that pupils only spoke English in school because there were so many pupils with EAL from the same countries. They formed friendships and communicated in their mother tongue, despite the school trying to encourage English speaking only.

Mobility could have a considerable effect on target setting for pupils. For example, Fischer Family Trust data was used in a number of schools, and even though headteachers felt that this only went some way in helping to develop predicted scores, there was tension between the pupils for whom targets were set, and those pupils who actually took the tests, owing to inward and outward mobility.

The barriers to improved outcomes at key stage 2 were complex and many, however the schools' commitment remained enthusiastic and dedicated. This was confirmed by the LA officers who emphasised that, with respect to raising standards at key stage 2: *'There is a huge willingness on the part of our schools to engage'*. They added the view that *'no-one could work more effectively'* than staff in the borough's schools.

5. Issues for consideration

The issues facing Slough schools are multi-faceted and complex. To support schools to improve attainment at key stage 2, further areas that Slough Borough Council and its schools might like to consider include:

- Reviewing the borough's inclusion strategy to support children with SEN – SEN pupils have an impact on school resources and account for a substantial drop in the percentage of pupils within individual schools achieving threshold levels.
- Promoting partnership working between schools and parents, specifically related to parents following the advice of schools when considering their child/children for school entrance exams, out of school hours learning, learning within the home environment.
- Commissioning further research to explore whether pupils who attend Slough primary schools achieve or exceed national expectations in key stages 3, 4 and 5.
- Conducting further analyses to determine whether there is a relationship between entry test results and performance at key stage 2. Qualitative research would also be useful in order to determine the possible effects of selection tests on pupil motivation.
- Promoting further partnership working between schools across Slough (primary and secondary schools) to ensure that all schools can provide appropriate support to all pupils.
- Applying for Primary Capital Programme for funds to adapt school buildings (where necessary) to how teachers teach rather than what they teach, therefore better meeting the needs of the children.
- Providing greater emphasis on teacher assessment to monitor progress rather than relying on 'snap-shot' attainment test data.
- Encouraging parents/carers to access early years education for their children so they have the best start to their educational career.

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